2: Kroeber E-5 (1930)1931 NU31 Seri NU31

789 Some shamans display their ability to hold live coals in their mouth.

Taboos

[88] 784 At first menstruation, the girl eats nothing (!) for 8 days, only drinking water. For 4 nights a *fiesta* is held for her, men and women dancing in a circle, anti-sunwise. She is outside the ring. Her head is not covered. San-pit roasting was unknown to the informant.

[841] At menstruation a woman drinks hot water. She may cook for others. She may not eat deer meat.

[844] After childbirth, both husband and wife eat only *atole* (gruel) and water, he for 4, she for 8 days. She may not work at all, he only a little, such as getting wood, "hunting" as necessary, etc.

[881] [224] There is no puberty ceremony for boys. Nothing is said to be known of any rule forbidding a boy to eat of the first game killed by him.

[833] Continence before hunting deer was not observed. Nor was there any special treatment or respect due the deer carcass. It is said that deer meat could not be left behind unless there was too much, but this is probably a statement of practise rather than a taboo.

Dances

535 [727] Besides the girl's puberty dance, the Seri also had a scalp dance. Only the frontal piece of the scalp was used. This was hung on a pole. Men (armed) and women danced together around it. If the scalp fell down, all would die.

Dances seen were solo on a plank laid over a shallow pit. Several singers sat by, beating or rattling anything convenient. Each song and dance lasted scarcely three minutes. The tempo is fast. The step is a quick double shuffle with alternate feet. In one type, the dancer held to a stick with one hand, his body and hanging arm remaining as motionless as possible. Another type was without the stick, the dancer holding a gourd rattle and keeping his body bent forward somewhat.

● 534 171 Rattles are of gourds, e'Xëc, on a stick, or of cocoons, Xekakë'ntɬa. Deer-hoof rattles were denied. The cocoons are on a band worn below the knee. The Yaqui-Mayo wear such knee-bands of cocoons; and sometimes of deer-hoofs. The Gila Pima also know the cocoon band.

Various Religious Items

276 Datura (toloache, jimsonweed) does not appear to have been used. Even the plant seems unknown, although it is said to occur in the Seri range.

778 789 Rain making seems to be by amulet rather than by direct shamanistic power. For instance, Antonio Herrera wears a small object

2:Davis & Dawson I-5 (1823-1949) 1945
MUSI Seri MUSI

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Sea turtle was still the staple meat, and with better boats and improved tools and tackle borrowed from the Mexicans, the living was becoming considerably less harsh along the shores. They then had nine boats for some two hundred people. One good boat could secure a living for five families, and they had well improved this minimum standard of living.

[161]

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773

The origin of the use of fire among the Seri's is unknown, but they have their own story of it. One day Chico Romero, present chief of the Seris (Fig. 19), made a fire drill out of a piece of dry driftwood and showed how to make a fire by turning the stick between the hands. In three or four minutes the fine dust became a glowing punk which, with the aid of some dry grass and the wind, was quickly fanned into a flame. He was then induced to tell the legend. He looked about and pointed to a little green and blue-bodied fly and said: "The gods sent this fly down from the sky to show us how to make fire. Notice when it lands. Did you not see

[534]
[535]

FIG. 18. THE NATIVE DANCE
IS DONE ON TOP OF A TURTLE SHELL TO THE BEAT OF A BOW STRING BEING STRUCK WHILE THE BOW IS HELD AGAINST TWO INVERTED BASKETS ON SAND.

[p. 265 (B)]

252 of nutritious material which was ground to powder on their stone ahsts, winnowed in shallow baskets and made into a meal or paste.

764 824 The abundant cacti of many species served several other functions in the domestic economy of the Seris. The thorny cholla whose insipid fruits were not fit to eat and whose spines were a constant threat to the unprotected bodies of the Seris, found one use, nevertheless, in the burial procedure. After a body was partly covered with earth in the three foot deep grave, it was densely overlaid with chollas before leveling, to discourage the coyotes from digging for the body.

396 824 The dry skeletons of the giant cacti provided the long, cylindrical poles used in knocking off ripe pitahayas as well as in all other instances in which a straight, slender pole was needed. Since the advent of the open boat in modern times, the cactus skeleton has come in for a new use, for after trituration between stone ahst and hupf, it was found to yield a satisfactory caulking compound when mixed with sea-lion oil.

312 824 The barrel cacti, *Ferocactus Wislizenii* and *F. Coulteri*, though ordinarily abundant on the Sonoran desert are rare in Seriland and practically absent from Isla Tiburon where they may easily have been exterminated by the improvident Seris during their centuries of occupancy on account of their recognized value as water providers on the wastelands over which the Seris so frequently ventured.

342 [132] 824 These Indians found housing no problem, for, living under a climate in which frost is rare and rain infrequent, they found little need for shelters except for protection against the blazing desert sun. Camps that were occupied for more than a day or two, however, usually saw the appearance of a group of crude sun shelters. These were usually made of long, flexible ocotillo branches, *Fouquieria splendens*, stuck in the sand and fashioned into an arched framework over which a more or less complete covering of brush was piled. If, by the sea, a windbreak were desired, the brush top and siding were usually augmented by the addition of several empty turtle shells.

262 824 On the delta plain of the Rio Sonora, the mesquite, *Prosopis juliflora*, grows in remarkable luxuriance, these gnarled, spiny trees forming an almost continuous open forest 20-40 feet high. Its fruit, consisting of small, hard beans borne in slender, woody pods forms a concentrated, starchy food that the Seris found highly nutritious if not appetizing. In late summer when all fresh vegetable food had withered and disappeared, provided the turtle fisheries had not yet attracted them back to their island, they often spent [252] some weeks gathering the beans and grinding them into a meal which was eaten as a watery atole or as a paste mixed with sea-lion oil. The more straggly and thorny cat's claw mesquite, *Acacia Greggii*, and the ironwood, *Olneya tesota*, also yielded woody beans in limited quantity.

[208] In the deeper gorges of the mountains the Seris found *Guaiacum Coulteri* yielding a berry of medicinal properties and also *Jacquinia pungens* which produced a nut, edible when not quite ripe, and forming a favorite rattle-[534] bead when dry.

Along sandy washes, particularly on the lower flood plain of the llano grows a low, shrubby weed, *Hymenoclea monogyra*. Although during times of drought it shrinks to stunted tussocks, after periods of heavy rain its flourishing fens produce abundant seeds eaten both by the beasts of the plain and formerly by the Seris.

385 [198] Before the advent of the tin can and the cardboard carton, basketry was an important handicraft among these Indians

[Text continues on p. 138--Analyst]

wear ceremonial feathers as did our western Indians. I saw no skin or cutaneous disease, or evidence of tuberculosis or of trachoma---the curse of our Indians.

One boy-child of five years was a handsome child---fat, round, sturdy, with roving great black eyes, large thick lips, a picture of perfect health. He was almost naked. His hair was done in a pigtail with a red string braided into it. His face like all the others was dirty, but he waded into the shallow water with a short spear and I saw him catch two crabs with his little harpoon. The water did not bother his face.

They had no plates or eating tools, except large deep clam shells, cast up by the sea, which served as cups and dippers. Their long, keen belt knives were used for cutting, carving or skinning, and always the fingers for eating. They gathered in a circle around an olla of seeds of long grass growing on the sea bottom prepared by winnowing, parching and grinding, and then cooked with turtle oil. Each one dipped his or her fingers into the olla and conveyed them to the mouth without losing a drop, and licked them off with great relish.

The dogs eat with the family. There were six or seven half-starved ones. If someone picked up a piece of turtle flipper the dog often took the first lick at it, bit off a piece or licked it before it reached the owner's mouth. The dogs were not punished. They were just slapped to keep them out of the pots.

We had a great time that evening in Seriland. The young man played his violin. This consisted of a hollow box cut out of a *palo verde* tree, and a piece of pine about sixteen inches long; terminating in a hollow where a single peg was fitted. The one string was twisted deer sinew, and the bridge was a small round clam shell at the far end. The bow was a small bent stick and some black horsehair. On the handle was a wad of rosin fastened underneath. By fingering this string a few weak squeaky notes were made, and this was the classical music of the Seris.

Manuel Encina seized his gourd rattle and began chanting. Herrera tapped a tin can and I beat on an inverted basket and the orchestra was in full swing. A young girl, Rosa, dragged out a turtle shell and standing on it began to dance. This dance consisted of stepping up and down quickly with each foot alternately, and this stamping, barefooted, emitted a hollow sound. Every once in a while I let out an Indian yell which pleased the Seris very much. For two hours they had a real swell time. We took one flashlight of the proceeding.

Each family was in their hut, which afforded very slight shelter as they were only partially roofed over and the sides were broken down in places. The huts were all adjoining and each had a little campfire, which did not give much illumination, so the dancing was in semi-darkness.

[text continues on p. 163]

friend of his from Guaymas, although only the upper part of the sail was visible. This greatly frightened the women who began packing to escape to the interior. They thought they were friends of ours and it was a plan to have them land. Bob proposed to go out and meet them, and if possible get provisions. With the Chief and two other Seris, Bob and his brother, leaving the firearms behind, hoisted the sail and headed for the mouth of the bay.

When they reached the Infernillo the sloop veered away, its crew being afraid of being killed by the Seri. There were six men and boys and they mustered all the rifles and stood ready to fight. They had just had trouble three days before at San Estevan. At last the wind veered and they had to stop and Bob waved his cap. Finally they got close enough to talk, and then came on board and secured some provisions---a little coffee, sugar, fresh onions, tomatoes and rice, and a little flour for the Chief. They had a fair wind back and returned about dusk.

At night everybody was happy. I had gathered two pails of oysters that are exposed on the rocks at low tide and I had built a fire over them so they would open readily, and then had cut them out. We made a sort of stew then, enough to go around the crowd.

After supper the Indians gave a dance, a very weird affair. I have seen nearly all the musical instruments used by the Indians of the Southwest and Mexico in their ceremonial dances, but the Seris were the first tribe I had ever seen use the bow and arrow as a musical instrument. A six-foot bow with a tightly stretched bowstring of twisted sinew was held, back down, on two inverted bowl baskets by one of three men, all of whom struck the string with arrows. This emitted a musical baritone note like the vibration of a piano wire, in perfect rhythm to the weird chanting of the three musicians, singing a wild plaintive air.

The dancer, Manuel Encina, a grim old boy, facing the orchestra, mounted the back of a turtle shell resting over a hollow in the sand, as a resonator, with a long staff held in his right hand to steady him, and gave one of the prettiest exhibitions of the double shuffle on the rounded top of an oily old turtle shell that I have ever seen. At the end of each *canto* there was a rest, and then they went at it again. This lasted two hours, and was lighted by a feeble camp fire and moon and was danced on the shore.

Before daybreak the following morning we arose, loaded the boat, and then the Indians brought a lot of things, besides three or four rifles. Then two young Indians jumped in. We were so crowded that we could not move. The two Indians and two of our men used paddles as we were too crowded to row. There were seven men besides all the junk, and the boat was so loaded and so cranky there was imminent danger of capsizing. At the least movement she would dip to the edge of her

439 little gods I traded some muslin, a harmonica and some *panoche*. For
123 native hair brushes, I traded three fine-tooth combs for catching *piojos*, or lice, easier. I gave each woman a little round mirror and they were greatly pleased.

To the old Chief I presented a good pocket knife and a mirror. For the bow I traded a spark lighter. By striking the edge of a small wheel with milled edge it strikes a spark from a small flint and lights a wick.

123 We asked for a dance, and the Seris, using the bow and striking
635 sticks for music, the slender girl jumped up and down on a flat piece
[534] of tin which served, instead, of a turtle shell and also served for
[252] baking flour cakes upon also. A while before, Louis had seen a woman
[415] wash her head and that of a child in the chamber pot, empty the water and then cook in it.

After the girl had danced a while on the tin, old Manual Encina pushed her away and hopped on himself and did the double-shuffle for half an hour, after which we left for our camp.

197 The language of the Seris is the most difficult and peculiar I
194 have ever heard. It is spoken deep in the throat with the mouth open and sounds like no other language I have ever heard except that there are some sounds like Papago.

439 Even before breakfast of the next day we were still trading with
123 the Indians, and in an hour or so I possessed nearly everything they had except their rags. They seemed happy and contented and postponed their trip to Hermosillo. I left some stuff with Louis Thomson to be traded later for bows and arrows, Pelican skin dresses and baby cradles.

We then arranged our loads, said *Adios* to the Seris, and left for Hermosillo, where we arrived without accident about six-thirty p.m. The sun was very hot and the road heavy and the sun glaring, and we were all very tired when we reached town. I stored my stuff with Mr. Marks at Hotel Cohen, and will crate it before leaving for Yaqui River.

123 Before leaving the Seri Chief I told him that whenever he saw
202 this sign---Circle Bar D and left hand below it, it was me---their friend, and not to shoot at me. He said he would tell all the Seris, and I left him my card with the same sign on it. When will I see him again!